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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: DASD WALLANDER PROMOTES PROGRESS ON REFORM

REF: TBILISI 1989

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary and comment. On the margins of the U.S.-Georgia Bilateral Defense Consultations (BDC), DASD Wallander spoke with senior government and parliamentary counterparts about next steps on reform, NATO membership, the National Security Review, the government's engagement strategy with the regions, and supply routes to Afghanistan, as well as the overall security situation. All sides agreed on the importance of Georgia's ongoing process of defense reform, as well as Georgia's more general process of democratic reform, and the positive impact of U.S. assistance toward those ends. The Georgians expressed concern that movement toward NATO membership was delayed; Wallander emphasized that there were multiple paths to membership, that Georgia was still on track, and that the process of reform writ large not only offered Georgia the best path to eventual membership, but provided Georgia with its own inherent benefits. The Georgians also made clear that they still perceive a real security threat from Russia. All sides agreed on the importance and positive impact of Georgia's contribution to the effort in Afghanistan. End summary and comment.

PARLIAMENTARY MEETING

2. (C) On November 19, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense Celeste Wallander, accompanied by members of the U.S. BDC team, met with members of the Georgian Parliament's Defense Committee. The parliamentarians raised concerns about Georgia's prospects for joining NATO, saying they perceived that Georgia was currently on a "slow track." They said they were moving as fast as they can on reform, but that process took time, and they were still in "learning mode." Wallander replied that there are multiple paths to NATO membership, and that the Bucharest Summit declaration was still valid, so that Georgia was still on the path to membership. She added that the transformative process of reform itself not only was the best way forward on NATO, but was by itself of fundamental benefit to Georgia.

3. (C) Regarding Georgia's ongoing defense reform, the parliamentarians saw a new defense strategy, education, and special forces as vital areas of reform. They explained they met twice a year with the Ministry of Defense in closed-door sessions to discuss issues. Wallander expressed support for the process of defense reform and indicated the United States would continue to support it. She also emphasized the importance of parliamentary oversight over the Ministry and the military in general, encouraging the parliamentarians to be actively involved in that pursuit.

NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR EKA TKESHELASHVILI

14. (C) The same day the Ambassador joined the group for meetings with Secretary of the National Security Council Eka Tkeshelashvili and State Minister for Reintegration Temuri Yakobashvili. Tkeshelashvili offered DASD Wallander an overview of Georgia's military reform and planning processes, including in particular the National Security Review (NSR). She explained that the government is currently undertaking a threat assessment, after which it would finalize the Review. She noted that the government was involving the opposition and think tanks representatives in the NSR process and has kept NATO partners informed as well. Emphasizing Georgia's Qkept NATO partners informed as well. Emphasizing Georgia's concerns about homeland defense, Tkeshelashvili expressed her understanding that the United States was not yet in a position to offer assistance with equipment, but noted that it would be important for the military to be able to plan for future procurement.

15. (C) Tkeshelashvili described Russia's current strategy as an effort to keep the United States on the defensive about defense cooperation with Georgia. Characterizing the current security situation as fragile, Tkeshelashvili called the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) very helpful in ensuring transparency on the Georgian side, thus enabling the government to refute allegations of a renewed military buildup. She expressed concern, however, that there was no such transparency on the other side of the boundaries. Citing the recent case of four teenagers detained by South Ossetian de facto authorities, Tkeshelashvili pointed out that, even though most such cases can be resolved through working-level connections, any such incident could lead to escalation. She also suggested that it might be helpful for the EUMM to expand its area of operations to such locales as

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the Pankisi Gorge and the Black Sea, which recent Russian statements and actions -- including the possible sale of French Mistral-class ships to Russia -- suggest could be areas for new provocations.

16. (C) DASD Wallander expressed her appreciation for Georgia's openness to cooperation and overall transparent approach to reform and planning efforts. Acknowledging that Georgia has the right to a General Defense Plan that provides for homeland defense, Wallander emphasized that the approach Georgia is taking to include all segments of society, including the opposition, in an open planning process will help gain additional support for Georgia, including in particular in Europe. She also explained that the more this process took place in a broader context of a political leadership clearly committed to democratic development, the better. She reported, for example, hearing very positive readouts of the recent review of Georgia's Annual National Plan (ANP) in Brussels, where the Georgians' careful preparation made a favorable impression on NATO allies. Wallander also mentioned that we might look to discuss an expansion of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) for supplies to Afghanistan; Tkeshelashvili indicated Georgia was always willing to explore additional cooperation in the interest of providing further diversification of routes. The DASD echoed Tkeshelashvili's appreciation for the EUMM, noting that it gave us a platform to remind the Europeans of Russia's outstanding obligation to comply with its commitments. Regarding the possible Mistral sale, Wallander agreed it would be wise for Georgia to leave consideration of this issue to others.

REINTEGRATION MINISTER TEMURI YAKOBASHVILI

17. (C) Minister Yakobashvili gave DASD Wallander an overview of the government's current effort to develop a strategy on the occupied territories. He noted the Ministry was seeking input from a broad range of interlocutors, including other government agencies, opposition members, diplomatic counterparts, and international organizations. Explaining that the government understood that there could be no

military solution, he said they were looking for ways to re-engage with the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and provide incentives for their eventual reintegration, once Russian forces left. Regarding the specific issue of travel documents for potential exchange participants from the regions, Yakobashvili said the government would now agree to tolerate their travel on Russian passports, if the travelers to apply for the necessary visas in Tbilisi (instead of Moscow). (Note: This represents a significant relaxation of the government's previous position, which required that all Georgian citizens -- including those from Abkhazia and South Ossetia -- travel on Georgian passports. See reftel. End note.)

18. (C) Yakobashvili echoed Tkeshelashvili's message of the fragility of the current security situation, calling it "security limbo" in which Georgia's fate depends on Russian Prime Minister Putin's mood when he wakes up in the morning. He said membership in NATO offered Georgia the best long-term security guarantee, explaining that Georgia would only be able to devote its full attention to development when it no longer had to worry about security. In the meantime he said Russia needed to receive clear signals that the rest of Georgia needed to receive clear signals that the rest of Georgia was off-limits, because it had shown it was willing "not just to deploy, but to employ power." He proposed more visits to Georgian ports by U.S. Navy vessels, for example. He agreed on the importance of pushing forward with democratic reform, noting that that transformation, which the government had enormous will to complete, was in Georgia's interest more than anyone else's. Although he agreed with the need for "strategic patience," he suggested that Georgia was "not impatient, just troubled and occupied." He expressed willingness to cooperate further on supply routes to Afghanistan, suggesting that the United States should also explore further options with other regional partners -- notably Turkmenistan.

19. (C) DASD Wallander saw the Ministry's draft strategy as a good way to keep Europe's attention on Georgia. She stated that Georgia was still very much on track toward NATO membership, and that the process of preparing for membership -- including progress on overall reforms -- would help Georgia become more secure, both by modernizing Georgia and by drawing favorable attention from Europe. (Yakobashvili replied that, although "happiness was a journey, not a destination" for some, "NATO was a destination" for Georgia.) The Ambassador added that making concrete progress on reforms helped Georgia in two very specific ways: first, it

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put the discussion in Brussels on the level of a debate about facts, not philosophy or geostrategy, that would make it easier for Georgia to overcome European objections; second, it played into Georgia's greatest strategic strength, its value as a model for what's possible in terms of democratic reform in the post-Soviet space. DASD Wallander noted that Georgia's contributions to the effort in Afghanistan were making Georgia's value as a partner even clearer to both the United States and Europe. She expressed appreciation for Georgia's cooperation on the NDN, noting that Georgia's contributions were so smooth that they might not even receive appropriate acknowledgment, and said the United States was discussing options with a number of other potential partners.

10. (U) DASD Wallander has cleared this message.
LOGSDON